

WHY WE "SUPPORT THE TROOPS": RHETORICAL EVOLUTIONS

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This essay tracks the genealogy of the contemporary call to "support the troops," a rhetoric that includes but goes beyond the strategic and argumentative use of the phrase itself. Support-the-troops rhetoric has two major functions: deflection and dissociation. Deflection involves discursive trends in play since Vietnam that have redefined war as a fight to save our own soldiers—especially the captive soldier—rather than as a struggle for policy goals external to the military. As such, this discourse directs civic attention away from the question of whether the particular war policy is just. The essay explicates these trends through an examination of the POW/MIA, war film, and the symbol of the yellow ribbon. The second trope, dissociation, quarantines the citizen from questions of military action by manufacturing distance between citizen and soldier. Dissociation often goes further to define civic deliberation and dissent as an attack on the soldier body and thus an ultimate immoral act. This essay explores this trope through executive rhetoric, an analysis of the particular phrase "support the troops," metaphor for war, and John Kerry's run for the presidency in 2004. Both deflection and dissociation work to discipline and mute public deliberation in matters of war. The essay concludes by considering strategies for reopening spaces for democratic deliberation.

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Discourses that justify war appear to display a surprising consistency over time. Since war is nearly always justified as a moral conflict—rather than, say, an economic one—all wars could be called holy wars.¹ The construction of this drama entails describing the threat of demons, enemy aggressors, savages, and the forces of disorder.² Here, evil agents kill with diabolical weapons for immoral purposes. Such negative discourse has its positive correlate, where the righteous use noble and true weapons to carry out divine will. This rhetoric justifies war as a vehicle for enacting missionary myths such as Manifest Destiny, the “white man’s burden,” Wilsonian idealism, or the more banal New World Order.³ When considering the rhetorical justification of state violence, common sense tells us to look for the construction of the basic good/evil agon within the ever-shifting matrix of names and circumstances. Although such dramas undoubtedly remain a part of contemporary war rhetoric, certain trends in the late twentieth century have yielded a more subtle discourse that has taken a central role in directing public attitudes, one arranged around the call to “support the troops.” This discourse does not engage the question of “why we fight” in the traditional sense of arguing that “our” cause is noble and “theirs” is malevolent. Rather, support-the-troops rhetoric works as a regulatory mechanism for disciplining the civic sphere itself—that is, it functions to subvert citizen deliberation.

In the strict sense, the admonition to support the troops is nothing new. So long as there have been wars, civilians have been asked to support the front lines with morale and materiel. The discourse under investigation here, however, is a specific strain that arose out of the ashes of the Vietnam conflict to achieve significant visibility during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Thereafter, the call to support the troops has become a ubiquitous feature in the public negotiation of war, present at nearly every deliberative moment and spilling into the everyday visual landscape. One can find the phrase itself on T-shirts and bumper stickers, emblazoned on magnetic yellow ribbons, on banners at charity events, in political debates, in church sermons, on advertising billboards, and just about everywhere in between. Indeed, just as war itself has come to be defined as a permanent condition, this admonishment has become a more or less permanent rhetorical fixture of contemporary U.S. public life. Apart from its density of presence, the contemporary call to support the troops has some paradoxical qualities. On the one hand, the phrase functions uncontroversially and apolitically as a prompt to send a thank you letter, volunteer at the local VA hospital, or simply appreciate the soldier’s selfless sacrifice. On the other hand, the

phrase is the object of a great deal of political contention. It is no secret that one of its dominant uses is as a strategic bludgeon to suppress dissent and guarantee that war opponents lose any debate. Indeed, the appearance of the phrase is often a signal that there will be no debate.⁴

This essay is not primarily an analysis of how the phrase "support the troops" operates argumentatively as a sleight-of-hand synonym for "support the war" nor how some in the peace movement have reappropriated the phrase with calls to "Support the Troops: Bring them Home." Instead the analysis takes a step back to examine the phrase as a nexus of larger symbolic associations. The phrase "support the troops" is only a symptom of a systemic rhetorical restructuring of the citizen's relationship to war. This broader sphere of what I call "support-the-troops rhetoric" has an evolutionary history, a genealogy that contains important clues to the current significance of the specific incantation. These associations ultimately work to construct, inscribe, and normalize an image of war itself and also an image of the ideal citizen-subject in relation to state violence.

I examine support-the-troops rhetoric through two rhetorical tropes. The first describes a defining feature of this rhetoric that I call "deflection," which is the redefinition of war from a struggle to attain an external objective to an internal struggle to save the soldier. Looking to the POW/MIA, the yellow ribbon, and other sites, the analysis tracks trends toward the gradual extraction of political justification from dominant narratives of war. If deflection conditions the image of war, the second trope, "dissociation," is a discourse that conditions the image of the proper wartime citizen. In particular, dissociation drives a wedge between the deliberating citizen and the soldier. The rhetoric of dissociation further codes civic deliberation and dissent as an attack on the soldier body, which pits this active citizen on the wrong side of a construed moral divide. In so doing, dissociation both quarantines the citizen from military matters and suppresses the deliberative impulse. Together, the tropes of deflection and dissociation interlace to form a broader support-the-troops rhetoric. This rhetoric does not function to justify war. Instead it constructs a war that needs no justification and a citizen who has no business engaging the question publicly. I argue that such rhetoric ultimately works to foreclose debate rather than encourage its citizens and representatives to engage directly the reasons for killing, whether they are right or wrong, legal or illegal, effective or ineffective. Conversely, understanding these mechanisms is vital for critically confronting autocratic forces and reasserting democratic ideals. To understand the vast root system

underlying the call to support the troops, we look first to the waning period of the Vietnam War.

DEFLECTION: WAR AS CAPTIVE SOLDIER

The American experience of Vietnam corresponded with a violent interruption of public faith in the federal government. Between 1964 and 1980, those claiming trust in the government “most of the time” or “just about always” fell from 76 to 25 percent.⁵ This sudden public reticence to authorize military ventures—what later became known among policy elites as the Vietnam Syndrome—came to provide fertile ground for new rhetorical strategies designed to recuperate public support. The following decades featured a massive reorganization of the public’s understanding of war and its dominant justifications. This new rhetoric of deflection mainly relocated the rationale for war from external objectives to the internal struggle to protect the soldier. As a trope, deflection functions not through the invention of more compelling arguments *per se*, but rather by redefining war as a technical affair not subject to deliberation. Though this rhetoric initially appeared as a series of overt strategies, I argue that its underlying structure has come to saturate public culture at the deep level of “common sense” in contemporary war discourse.

The seeds of deflective rhetoric were planted by Presidents Johnson and Nixon in response to falling support for U.S. occupation and bombing of Vietnam. For Johnson, this reached a critical low in 1967, and it was at this point the administration began to take deliberate steps to contain antiwar sentiment. Specifically, Johnson created the National Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, which organized demonstrations and letter-writing campaigns to “Support Our Boys in Vietnam.”⁶ These efforts represented an initial step toward refocusing public attention on the soldier in the interest of rallying a public no longer responding to the standard external justifications for war, such as containing communism. The Nixon administration intensified this strategy, especially after the precipitous drop in public trust following the 1968 Tet Offensive. Here, official rhetoric sought to recast military involvement in Vietnam not as a means to an end but rather as a fight to save our own soldiers.⁷

The primary vehicle for this transformation was the prisoner of war. In a study of television statements of administration officials after the Tet Offensive, Daniel Hallin found a marked shift toward official concern for

soldiers and prisoners of war.⁸ Another indication of this shift was the designation of the "POW/MIA" in 1973. As H. Bruce Franklin notes, up to this point POW (prisoner of war) and MIA (missing-in-action) had been separate designations. A POW was a soldier acknowledged to be in enemy captivity, while MIA represented a much higher number of soldiers whose bodies were unrecoverable, such as in the case of downed aircraft. (The number of MIA from World War II, for example, remains at around 74,000.⁹) Erasing distinctions between these two groups implied that the number of live soldiers held by the Viet Cong ranged in the thousands as opposed to the relatively small number of official POWs.¹⁰ Moreover, the conflation ensured that the Viet Cong would never be able to account for and return all of the POW/MIAs as the administration requested. Indeed, all 56 official POWs were released in 1973 as part of "Operation Homecoming," and these were the last Vietnamese-held U.S. soldiers to return home. This impression that Vietnam still held thousands of live servicemen breathed new life into the war effort and aided the administration in prolonging military operations well into the 1970s amid massive public disillusionment. Even after the withdrawal of troops, the myth provided justification for the U.S. government to renege on reparations agreements and wage a continued, punitive, economic war against Vietnam. The POW/MIA designation worked by deflecting attention away from criticism of U.S. actions in Vietnam and toward an emerging dominant rationale for war: the protection of soldiers.

The cultural fallout of these rhetorical maneuvers can be best measured on film. Post-Vietnam War film followed this public shift in attention, progressively cleansing the memory of war of references to political ideals and policy objectives. The trauma of Vietnam provoked a clear break with twentieth-century war film, producing a series of existential dramas like *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), and *Casualties of War* (1989). These films are widely considered to be antiwar because of their bleak departure from traditional war cinema. Karen Rasmussen and Sharon Downey argue, for example, that the films uncoupled the link between militarism and moralism that had for so long kept close company in Hollywood's image of the warrior.¹¹ This new class of films levied its critique mainly through negative means, however. Rather than wield a set of values that challenged U.S. involvement in Vietnam, these films substituted a kind of moral ambiguity, a loss of compass, preferring to orbit around the personal crisis of the soldier—from the Russian roulette metaphor in *The Deer Hunter* to "the horror" of the blood sacrifice in *Apocalypse Now*. In contrast

to the Western triumphalism and righteousness of purpose in John Wayne's *The Green Berets* (1968), they explored disillusionment toward the values that gave war purpose, locating the crisis neither in the field of politics nor between combatants but within the soldier himself.

At the same time another class of films approached the memory of Vietnam from the opposite direction. These included *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), the *Missing in Action* franchise (1984, 1985, 1988), and *Uncommon Valor* (1983). Relying heavily on the POW/MIA mythology established by the Nixon administration, these films featured hypermasculine American bodies performing inhuman feats of rescue. Such films sought to reestablish an ordered agon of battle by retrieving American soldiers who had supposedly been left behind. Curiously, this class of "prowar" films exhibited a similar aversion to engaging the reasons for war as the genre of "antiwar" films mentioned above. As a projection of the POW/MIA myth, *Rambo* regarded these reasons to be irrelevant to the immediate crisis of the imprisoned soldier and the intrepid savior. The 1980s were thus a dialectical period between nominally "antiwar" stories of existential crisis and "prowar" stories of heroic rescue, both magnifying the experience of the soldier to fill the frame.

The 1990s began to resolve this stark division by combining the personal disillusionment of an *Apocalypse Now* with a rescue-bound *Rambo*. The result was a class of war films characterized by what Frank Wetta and Martin Novelli call the "new patriotism."¹² These films conspicuously avoided even superficial references to reasons for the fighting, instead reducing the scope of the drama to the individual or "band of brothers." At times the stories feature themes of personal revenge, as in *The Patriot* (2000), a treatment of the American Revolution. Here the eponymous main character played by Mel Gibson takes up arms not out of loyalty to country or the cause of independence, but rather to avenge the murder of his two sons. "Nowhere in the film," Wetta and Novelli point out, "does Gibson utter a single word on behalf of the struggle against the British for independence," a strange omission considering the title of the film.¹³ Frequently the crisis involves a rescue mission to save an endangered soldier, the stock motif of the "new patriotism" as represented by *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), or *Black Hawk Down* (2001). Here immediate loyalty to one's comrades-in-arms fully eclipses any sense of duty to larger ideals, a quality that Robin Andersen recognizes in *Black Hawk Down*, a film where "engaging in military conflict has lost all political justification."¹⁴ This new standard answers the WWII question of "why we fight" with "for the soldiers themselves." *Forrest Gump*

(1994) portrays Vietnam from the standpoint of the new patriotism's ideal witness: a blissfully ignorant soul who, upon finding himself quite accidentally in the midst of a firefight with a literally invisible enemy, acts bravely to save his friend. Films such as these reiterated the emerging narrative of war, which generally combined unflinching realism with a narrative of military self-protection—all while marginalizing questions of policy and narrowing the frame to the immediate concerns of the battlefield.

This shift in perspective yielded a certain paradox. On the one hand, these new war films were "antiwar" insofar as they reflect post-Vietnam sensibilities: a cynical regard for the glory of battle and a willingness to imagine war vividly at its most unsavory, brutal, and chaotic. On the other hand, breathtakingly gory films like *Black Hawk Down* and *Saving Private Ryan* received full production support from the Pentagon's Hollywood Liaison Office.¹⁵ This ceases to be a contradiction, however, when understood in terms of the new patriotism or what Stephen Klein calls the "anti-war, pro-soldier war film," a genre of which he takes *Black Hawk Down* to be a prime example.¹⁶ Here the morality of war shifts from a reliance on a noble cause to making sure no one gets left behind in a hellish situation. Such a film thus achieves a "prowar" effect through what has been long recognized as an "antiwar" aesthetic. The rescue motif is the key to this reversal. Here the more antiwar the film in its grisly senselessness, the more it invokes the need for a savior in the form of military action. This theme permeates the post-Vietnam civic understanding of war.¹⁷

As perhaps the most visible war film of the decade, Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* exemplified the qualities of the new patriotism best. Although the film premiered in the midst of a fervent commemoration of World War II and a revival of American triumphalism by way of "the good war," the film conspicuously avoided referencing what made the war good. Critic Albert Auster, for example, notes that *Saving Private Ryan* is an "ahistorical" war film that even goes so far as to omit any acknowledgment that the United States had allies in World War II.¹⁸ Scholars widely regarded this attribute of the film as a puzzle to be solved. Marouf Hasian Jr. argues that the lack of politics in the film functions as a Rorschach test: leftists can appreciate the film for its graphic depiction of the senseless brutality of warfare, moderates for the film's oblique critique of bureaucracy, and conservatives for the celebration of individual virtue and sacrifice as the nation overcomes the remnants of the Vietnam Syndrome.¹⁹ A. Susan Owen suggests that the lack of overt politics is indicative of a strategy that "privileges vision over utterance" in the service

of reimagining the heroic American after a long bout with post-Vietnam cinema.²⁰ Peter Ehrenhaus argues that even though the film “suppresses the indispensable element of justification,” its visual subtext Americanizes the Nazi holocaust to recuperate a sense of national moral purpose.²¹ Each of these critiques assumes that a traditional rationale—however subtle—must be somewhere in the film, whether disbursed through a multiplicity of narratives or sublimated into a visual language.

The fact that the film compels such a quest is one signal of a migration in dominant narratives of war. Indeed, *Saving Private Ryan* is a near-perfect enactment of a shift away from external objectives and toward the soldier as justification. In her exploration of public memory and World War II, Barbara Biesecker takes particular note of how the spectacle of the suffering soldier displaces such justifications. The film’s primary aesthetic, Biesecker argues, is “a mass execution” where the “white pained male body of war” functions as a “ground for the production of knowledge and judgment.”²² Dispensing with references to public policy, legitimacy, and why we fight, the film thus oscillates between private spaces: the bodily pain on the battlefield, “band of brothers” camaraderie, snapshots of an idealized home, and the personal anguish of memory.²³ Biesecker concludes that the film reduces patriotism to private gestures and spaces, thus producing a citizen similarly disciplined. Her insights intimate a structural turn at the very core of what it means to “justify a war.” Indeed, this privatizing of the relationship with the suffering soldier body is the essential turn inward that animates the larger rhetoric of deflection.

What is the nature of this deflective identification with the suffering soldier body? One could argue, after all, that *Saving Private Ryan* exhibits features of the classic “cult of the fallen soldier,” a poetic idealizing of a battlefield death and the honoring of war for its ability to effect spiritual purification. George L. Mosse argues that the cult of the fallen, whose memorializing practices helped drive the Germans into World War I, derives much of its force from the Christ myth, where death itself gains a redemptive function.²⁴ Such elements appear to be prominent in *Saving Private Ryan*. Near the beginning of the film, the savior undergoes a painful execution through the spectacle of Omaha Beach; and at the end, Ryan presumably speaks for all of the faithful and saved when he delivers his requiem at the grave of his fallen comrades: “I hope that at least in your eyes I have earned what all of you have done for me.”

Private Ryan features important twists on the cult of the fallen trope,

however. First, the film does not so much beatify the fallen soldier as it does the opposite, dwelling on the banal horrors of the fragile body caught in the gears of a machine war. Second, the central storyline is not about the soldier fearlessly plunging into the purifying fire, but rather folds the soldier's journey back on itself in a narrative of self-preservation. Finally, instead of provoking the citizen's abstract and distant veneration of an ideal soldier-other, the film transports the citizen into the role of the soldier, interpellating the viewer in a feedback loop with both savior and saved. Taken together, these departures suggest that the film does something other than revert back to the cult of the fallen that has functioned so long to elevate war to a spiritual enterprise. Instead, the narrative in *Saving Private Ryan* portrays a different cult of the soldier, one that relies heavily on themes of victimhood, self-protection, salvation, and survival.

More accurately, *Private Ryan* and its ilk represent a version of the captivity narrative, which has a deep history in American political life. Though the narrative can be traced back to the story of Jewish bondage in Egypt, among the American Puritans it developed into a recognizable genre.²⁵ These stories mainly recount the first-hand experiences of a white captive (often a woman) in Indian hands, an experience commonly described as an encounter with a demonized other, complete with tales of rape, infanticide, and cannibalism.²⁶ Puritan leaders often interpreted these stories in various ways: sometimes the captured figure served as a model of religious resilience among the heathens, an interpretation resonant with the story of the Israelites; other times, the captivity represented God's punishment for straying from the flock.²⁷ During the postrevolutionary period, Puritan captivity stories experienced a renaissance. Here British tyranny replaced the scourge of Indians, and secular patriotism stood in for God's providence.²⁸ Arguably, the first American POW tale appeared during this period as well, the *Narrative of Col. Ethan Allen's Captivity*, written by Allen during his tenure in a British prison.²⁹ The genre persisted thereafter, mainly to mediate the drama of American westward expansion in the nineteenth century and other imperial activities.³⁰

I argue here that captivity has again emerged as a primary motif in the contemporary rhetoric of war. Between Vietnam and the first Gulf War, the captive has worn a variety of masks. As discussed, the captive represented by the Vietnam-era POW/MIA was the soldier. Civilians comprised the captives that animated international affairs of the late 1970s and 1980s, from the Iranian hostage crisis, to the *Achille Lauro* cruise ship, TWA Flight 847, and Lebanon. Such was also the case for the U.S. invasion of Grenada in

1983, where Ronald Reagan forwent the rhetoric of demonizing communist rebels to speak instead of the “chaos” that engulfed American civilians still on the island.³¹ Susan Jeffords suggests that the rhetoric of the first Gulf War—the United States as protector of the New World Order, Iraq as the villain, and the “rape of Kuwait”—was a species of the captivity narrative as well.³² This period, when policy leaders were forced to contend with the post-Vietnam civilian aversion to war, could be seen as one of ferment. During the 1990s, however, the narrative began to solidify, positioning the soldier as representative captive.

The maturation of the soldier-as-captive tale could best be seen in the April 1, 2003, televised rescue of Private First Class Jessica Lynch “from behind enemy lines.” The official Pentagon account of Lynch’s rescue appeared to borrow its storyline directly from Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). In fact, NBC aired a made-for-TV movie produced in cooperation with the Pentagon entitled *Saving Jessica Lynch* (2003), a docudrama that followed on the heels of two documentaries, A&E’s *Saving Private Lynch* (2003) and The Discovery Channel’s *Saving POW Lynch* (2003).³³ This official story suggested that Lynch’s supply convoy had been ambushed, and though she fought valiantly, she had been captured, brutalized, raped, and held at a hospital controlled by armed insurgents. The story continued that a squad of U.S. commandos stormed the hospital and heroically rescued Lynch from her captors, an event billed as the first rescue of an American soldier from behind enemy lines since World War II. To illustrate, the Pentagon released night vision footage of the rescue filmed by cameras fitted to her rescuers’ helmets. Though dramatic, the story was quickly revealed to be a gross falsification of events and, proper to April Fool’s Day, had even been staged to a degree.³⁴ Beyond its blatant exaggerations, the public relations choice to feature Lynch at the height of the television war is significant. The heroic story might have been the capture of an enemy commander or an act of self-sacrifice to protect an Iraqi family. Instead the representative anecdote was the rescue of one of the military’s own soldiers.

The Lynch story restaged the classic captivity narrative in multiple ways. Though part of an occupational force, Lynch’s status as a member of a supply convoy positioned her as victim rather than aggressor. Media attention to her gender, diminutive stature, and alleged sexual assault marked her as an object of protection—a “damsel in distress”—in tune with the genre.³⁵ Selectively featured over an African American fellow POW, the focus on the “all-American,” blonde-haired, blue-eyed Lynch helped to inscribe the

racial subtext of white American civilization versus dark Iraqi barbarism.³⁶ The "embedded reporting" news environment offered further opportunities for identification with the captivity narrative. With cameras affixed to the soldiers' helmets, viewers at home assumed the point of view of the rescuers. These images alternated with snapshots of the Lynch family home in West Virginia, decked out in yellow ribbons and surrounded by prayerful supporters. The drama was simple, unquestionably noble, successful, and stripped of all cumbersome explanations about the rightness of the Iraq invasion. The event infused the civic sphere with a ritual of military self-protection, thus displacing the deliberative impulse with a depoliticized version of the "new patriotism." Indeed, the Lynch narrative bore an uncanny resemblance to another story grabbing headlines during the same period, the kidnapping of Elizabeth Smart, also a blonde 20-year-old. In fact, NBC's *Saving Jessica Lynch* and CBS's *The Elizabeth Smart Story* aired in the very same time slot on November 9, 2003, going head-to-head during sweeps.³⁷ Refracted through the Lynch drama, participation in the war did not look so different from participation in the Smart captivity. Both featured victims of circumstance, anxious families, heroic authorities, and implied publics who pull together to endure a moment of crisis.

Perhaps the best illustration of the displacement of the hostage by the soldier can be seen in the genealogy of the yellow ribbon, what has become the sign of support-the-troops rhetoric par excellence. Folklorist Gerald E. Parsons notes that, whereas personal talismans of chastity and loyalty have been worn for centuries (mainly by women), the yellow ribbon phenomenon emerged out of a story circulated in the 1960s. The story told of a recently released prisoner on his way home by bus. The man had written his wife to tell her that if she wanted him back, she should signal him by tying a white ribbon to the front yard oak tree. If no ribbon appeared, he would know to keep traveling down the road. As the house drew closer, the tale says, the man saw a hundred white ribbons tied to the tree. This variation of the prodigal son parable found its largest audience among church congregations, subscribers to *Reader's Digest* and the *New York Post* (both of which printed the story under the title "Going Home"), as well as viewers of an ABC adaptation of the tale starring James Earl Jones as the ex-convict. In 1973, Tony Orlando recorded "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree," a massive hit that told the story of the prisoner while altering the color of the ribbon for the sake of rhythm.³⁸ In a 1975 instance of life imitating art, Gail Magruder, wife of Watergate convict Jeb Magruder, decorated her porch

with yellow ribbons on Jeb's return from jail. The yellow ribbon transferred its meaning from prisoner to hostage and achieved mass visibility during the 1979 Iranian Hostage Crisis when the wife of one hostage tied a ribbon around the family's oak tree. The *Washington Post* suggested that others vent their "Irage" by doing the same, and support organizations took up the task.³⁹ This association held through the perennial hostage crises and heroic homecomings that characterized the 1980s.

With Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the symbol underwent yet another important mutation in meaning, transferring its referent from hostage to soldier. When Iraqi armies rolled into Kuwait in August of 1990, some 3,000 Americans were held hostage in both countries. By December, all of them had returned home without fanfare, largely ignored by both the Bush administration and the press rather than hailed as heroes.⁴⁰ John S. Lawrence notes that the usual style of "hostage journalism" was largely transplanted onto the story of the soldier such that the real civilian hostages all but disappeared from public consciousness. By the time the hostages returned, the organization "Operation Yellow Ribbon" had reassigned the ribbon to the soldier. The visage of the civilian hostage also went missing from the limited edition yellow-ribboned Franklin Mint plate entitled *Coming Home* as well as from *People Magazine's* commemorative issue entitled "Heroes of the War: Fifteen Most Intriguing People."⁴¹ The personalized stories of familial suffering and captive innocence that characterized the civic relationship with the hostage thus began to characterize the civic relationship to the soldier. This shift in framing generally disabled attempts to deliberate the legitimacy of the war. Lawrence notes the example of the *Des Moines Register*, which was editorially against the war in a state whose senators both opposed the war. When the paper adopted hostage journalism, "its coverage was hardly to be distinguished from that of papers that were editorially hawkish."⁴² The war-as-captivity/soldier-as-captive metaphors evoked a drama that called on the citizenry to disengage the political question of what is just, and instead hope and pray while the technical sphere executed a defensive, ongoing, and unquestionable task.

The yellow ribbon that currently refers to the soldier thus carries a bloodline that animates the symbol in subtle ways. When the ribbon appears in the context of military atrocity investigation such as Abu Ghraib or Haditha, the forgiven criminal and prodigal son metaphors cannot help but condition the scene. In its strongest form, support-the-troops discourse has the potential to act as an antidote to public outrage by transferring guilt from policy makers

to an embattled individual soldier in need of forgiveness. The legacy of the hostage metaphor is perhaps more pertinent here as it relocates the drama of war from the public to the technical sphere. Mapping this metaphor onto the soldier, moreover, further internalizes conflict, casting state violence as an inevitable and self-justifying affair. This tautology—that the military exists to save itself—has emerged as a primary validation for military action. Beyond the prisoner and hostage metaphors, the yellow ribbon has accrued associations that intensify these effects, what I will describe here as the regendering of the home front, the medicalization of war, and the natural disaster metaphor.

First, the yellow ribbon's migration provides important clues to trends in war's gendered landscape. The ribbon is a feminine symbol. In the popular vernacular, a piece of fabric tied around a masculine pole has been long used in various contexts to connote loyalty and chastity of body. In Western art, nations have been often depicted through female personages, and the ribbon (or chastity knot) has been used to symbolize national integrity of a feminized territory.⁴³ The appearance of the yellow ribbon as a mass culture phenomenon during the first Gulf War in 1991 thus can be read as part of a shifting gender landscape. Rather than revert to traditional patterns of masculinizing "us" and feminizing "them," George Mariscal suggests that the rhetoric of the first Gulf War in many ways reversed roles, depicting Saddam Hussein as a hypermasculine threat, the U.S. military leadership as compassionate bureaucrats "doing a job," and the U.S. home front—festooned with ribbons—as docile, domesticated, and feminized.⁴⁴ The reversal in the gendering of war is arguably a symptom of a shift in the locus of the "battlefield" in the post-Cold War era of unchallengeable American dominance, where public opinion at home decides the outcome of a war far more than does the enemy abroad.⁴⁵ Winning the home front battle in this sense means politically disarming and domesticating the citizen, which means defining the citizen's rightful place not in public life but rather in a supportive role under a strict presidential father figure. The yellow ribbon is the totem of this transformation.

The yellow ribbon plays a central role in overcoding war with a medical metaphor as well. The practice finds itself within a broader genre of multi-colored "awareness ribbons" including those for AIDS, teen suicide, autism, drunk driving, and breast cancer among other threats to the individual and social body. This explosion of ribbons occurred immediately after the 1991 Gulf War, beginning with the red AIDS ribbon worn by Jeremy Irons

at the 1991 Tony Awards, an event that initiated the “Year of the Ribbon” according to the *New York Times*.⁴⁶ The arrival of this phenomenon on the heels of the Gulf War signals that a medical metaphor had been incipient in the yellow ribbon already.⁴⁷ The ease of this transition is also a symptom that the meaning of war had aligned itself with a chronic condition rather than a state of exception, what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest is a defining feature of post–Cold War geopolitics, a rhetoric of generalized and never-ending war.⁴⁸

Additionally, the arrival of the medical metaphor indicated the relocation of war from the political realm to the technical realm. The metaphor worked to describe enemy activity as mental illness: insanity, religious fanaticism, or irrational resentment (“They hate us for our freedom”), demoting unauthorized violence from a political condition to a disease epidemic that must be “eradicated.”⁴⁹ A similar rhetoric applied to dissent on the home front. Writing about the first Gulf War, Dana Cloud notes that dissent was recoded from a legitimate civic activity to a disease of the body politic—as in the metaphor of the Vietnam Syndrome—that should be cured through private and therapeutic rituals.⁵⁰ The medicalizing of war thus yields a discourse that further distances war from political justification and a deliberative citizenry, instead offering up a drama of siege, victims, and governmental experts.

The disease metaphor has much in common with the natural disaster metaphor, both of which fall under the category of “acts of God” that transcend the deliberative realm. The two often bleed into one another in contemporary war discourse. The attacks of September 11, 2001, and the ensuing “War on Terror” made extensive use of the natural disaster metaphor. The new heroes of this war were “emergency response teams” who took the form of firefighters, national security specialists, and rapid deployment police forces. In 2003, the executive branch merged the Federal Emergency Management Agency, a formerly independent organization in charge of aiding in natural disasters, with the new Department of Homeland Security. That same year, the administration unveiled what became the National Counterterrorism Center, portraying it much as a storm-tracking outfit populated by experts who gather systemic data (“chatter”) to predict the next seismic event.⁵¹ The ubiquitous color-coded “terrorist threat level” indicator mimicked the style of a storm warning meter. This symbolic environment precluded the notion that the attacks, however atrocious, related to larger political realities. Instead, this discourse describes terrorism as a metaphysical evil that wells up to strike with the indiscriminate caprice of the weather.

Slavoj Žižek noticed this rhetoric at work in two fictionalized 9/11 films that arrived in 2006, Paul Greengrass's *United 93* and Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center*. Both lack political context to the point that, "in the case of WTC, one can easily imagine exactly the same film in which the twin towers would have collapsed as the result of an earthquake." Žižek notes that the conspicuous lack of political message had a politics all its own: "It is the message of an implicit trust in one's government: when under attack, one just has to do one's duty."⁵² The natural disaster metaphor does not admit itself as an object of public deliberation. Rather, the metaphor naturalizes war by occluding the reasons for conflict while suggesting the public's proper role within the drama: solidarity with victims and deference to leadership. G. Thomas Goodnight notes that the presence of this underlying metaphor indicates a transference of attention from the public to the technical sphere.⁵³ This deflection could be detected in November of 2004 when the Pentagon launched the *America Supports You* campaign. The campaign consisted of a website (*americasupportsyoudmil*) and announcements distributed by the Ad Council.⁵⁴ The campaign articulated the ideal citizen's wartime disposition toward the military, which did not significantly differ from joining a disaster aid organization.⁵⁵ Like the yellow ribbon, the campaign operated on numerous planes: to assign war to the captive soldier, to condition the drama with medical and natural disaster metaphors, and to feminize the civic field around patriarchal norms of submission and support. Such discourse restructures the drama of war as a rescue operation that by nature resists debate.

Of course, to say exactly what the yellow ribbon specifically means is to deny its inherent instability, its disputed and multiple meanings. Scholars have pointed out its wide spectrum of dominant prowar connotations, neutral valences, and even antiwar reappropriations.⁵⁶ One of the central characteristics of the ribbon invites its own "remixing" or inclusion in what Jack Santino calls "folk assemblages": Christmas and Easter ornaments, flags, bumper stickers, decals, fashion, wreaths, and endless other decorations.⁵⁷ In this sense, it is difficult to offer final pronouncements on the meaning of such a polysemic object. It does not necessarily follow, however, that the ribbon lacks a stable function. Indeed, the riddle of the yellow ribbon is not unlike the riddle posed by *Saving Private Ryan*. The ribbon's defining attribute is its plausible deniability as a political symbol. It tends to define war as an event to which civic deliberation is simply irrelevant. The ribbon saturates the public sphere, operating as a proxy for civic deliberation, while at the

same time constantly retreating from the public sphere. This retreat is the enactment of its deflection function.

DISSOCIATION: PROTESTER VERSUS SOLDIER

If deflection works to construct the drama of war, the function of dissociation works to construct the citizen. This aspect of support-the-troops rhetoric quarantines the citizen from military affairs while coding public deliberation regarding matters of state violence as an immoral act. This rhetoric operates first by inserting distance between citizen and soldier identities such that it is difficult to imagine the two inhabiting the same body or sharing the same interests. Second, dissociative rhetoric constructs fundamental aspects of the citizen (deliberative participation and the prerogative of dissent) as hostile to the soldier. This rhetoric runs directly counter to the idea that open debate is necessary to keep leaders honest and to guard against the misuse and abuse of the military. Instead, the rhetoric of dissociation disciplines the citizen by painting democratic deliberation as a particularly heinous act of aggression against the already embattled soldier. The following discussion of the rhetoric of dissociation attends to the dynamics of separation before moving on to the construction of antagonism.

The gradual institutional separation of citizen from soldier has been a notable aspect of post-WWII American life.⁵⁸ This dismantling of the citizen-soldier ideal has had high costs, especially in terms of the citizen's political voice regarding the use of the military.⁵⁹ Simply put, the citizen has been largely quarantined from military matters. This trend is rhetorical as well as institutional. Andrew Bacevich describes this change succinctly in his assessment of the call to "support the troops." Writing in 2005, the army veteran suggested that "support *for*" has replaced "service *with*" as the "new standard of civic responsibility" in wartime.⁶⁰ In this symbolic context, the civic posture toward the military is one of detached veneration rather than invested political accountability. Kenon Breazeale notes during the 1991 Gulf War that a dominant mode of "support" came in the form of practices of consumption as support-themed goods flooded the market.⁶¹ "Support" thus took on a much different character than it had in the days of rationing, war bonds, and the draft. It instead translated into a set of behaviors that implied a strict division of sacrifice between citizen and soldier.

The choice of "troops" to describe the object of "support" intensifies these

dissociative effects. One could assemble a short list of possible alternatives such as "support our soldiers," "support the military," or "support the war effort." "Troops," however, has particular qualities that structure the citizen's relationship to the soldier. In tune with the previously discussed rhetoric of deflection, the term anchors the soldier at the center of war discourse, calling civic attention away from the point of policy's deliberation and toward its point of execution. Doing so serves an important dissociative function. Locating the military in the metonym of "troops"—rather than the general, the president, Congress, the corporate elite—upends the usual hierarchical command structure. This rhetoric implies the opposite of the time-honored American principle of civilian control of the military: that the soldiers deployed themselves. In the era of the all-volunteer force, this reversal can be heard in argument that one should not object to soldier deaths because military volunteers "knew what they were getting into." Such sentiments signal a growing dissociation between citizen and soldier as the former relinquishes accountability for the use or misuse of the latter. Rhetorically reversing the chain of command has become part of official strategy. For example, in late 2003 it came to light that a high-ranking army officer had sent over 500 identical op-ed letters lauding the success of army operations in Kirkuk. The letters were fraudulently attributed to individual soldiers and sent to their hometown newspapers.⁶² Though a bungled "black propaganda" scheme to salvage public opinion, such rhetorics reinforced the image of the self-contained and self-deployed soldier. This image cuts the deliberative tie that connects the citizen to the fate of the soldier. Remarkably, this and other attempts to relocate agency to the "troops" seem to be unburdened by—and even operate in spite of—what the troops really think.⁶³

The op-ed letter incident is an apt metaphor for the second function of "troops," which is to fuse lower-rank soldiers together with the leadership into one consubstantial entity of singular purpose. Even as it operates in the name of the soldier, the discourse erases the individual soldier instead and offers a composite image of the military. In contrast to "soldiers," which represents a plurality of individuals, "troops" begs to be interpreted as a singularity. Barbara Biesecker describes this aesthetic in *Saving Private Ryan's* Omaha Beach landing scene, which takes place even before the introduction of characters. The inversion, she argues, has the effect of promoting "our patriotic identification with *all* of them while blocking our subjective identification with any *one* of them."⁶⁴ Robin Andersen also recognizes this dynamic in *Saving Private Ryan* as well as *Black Hawk Down*. Andersen notes that if a

film like *Rambo: First Blood Part II* featured the exaggeration of the individual hero, *Black Hawk Down* did precisely the opposite, presenting soldiers as an endangered, undifferentiated mass.⁶⁵ That is, the film was about the troops without being about the soldiers. I want to suggest that this contemporary portrayal does double duty. In addition to positioning the endangered soldier body at war's center of gravity (deflection), this rhetoric thwarts identification with the individual soldier (dissociation). The abstraction into "troops" sets up boundaries that resist the dissent-inspiring effects that accompanying picturing the soldier as a real individual, such as soldier body counts.

The trope of dissociation has a visual component that follows similar rules. For example, the POW/MIA flag, the movie poster for *Saving Private Ryan*, and ads for the *America Supports You* campaign all make use of the soldier silhouette. The silhouette is a stock instrument for aestheticizing war and rendering it a dreamlike and distant object of uncritical consumption, which is part of the silhouette's dissociative power.⁶⁶ Beyond this, the image features a conspicuous absence of concrete indicators that might situate the soldier, who (even in the case of *Private Ryan*) appears as an abstraction. The silhouette seems to transcend time, haunted by an existential threat that is equally disembodied and metaphysical. As such the dissociative aspect of the image threads itself intimately through the deflative story of captivity in all of its isolation and peril. Here night descends through a washed out, stormy sky, stranding the soldier on a desolate landscape—a recapitulation of what Breazeale notes was the dominant description of the soldier during the 1991 Gulf War: "ill-trained and ill-provisioned boy and girl scouts wandering lost" in the desert.⁶⁷

The soldier does not strike a classically heroic or aggressive pose but rather wears a resigned posture of stamina and survival. This soldier is on the verge of oblivion, a problem that sets up the moral call to "never forget," "save," or "never leave behind." The dissociative aspect of this image is situated within the narrative of loss and salvation. Like the term "troops," the silhouette empties the figure of particularity, blocks identification with the individual soldier, and takes on the larger abstract significance of "the military." And like "troops," the metonym of the silhouette positions the soldier as the war's objective while encouraging a civic relationship with the military as a distant, decontextualized, and long-suffering personage. This personage does not require a responsibility for war policy but rather a sentimental empathy: a private relationship paradoxically flush with abstract distance.

In addition to crafting distance between citizen and soldier identities,

the rhetoric of dissociation constructs the deliberative citizen as harboring an active antagonism for the soldier. To explore this aspect, we revisit the late Vietnam period and the figure of the protesting soldier. The seeds of a broader and persistent rhetoric of dissociation were planted in attempts to minimize the symbolic power of this particular character, efforts that were so successful that the dissenting soldier has gone largely missing from the conventional image of the Vietnam-era peace movement.⁶⁸ Contrary to this enduring image, the presence of the antiwar soldier during the late stages of Vietnam was quite strong. Polls of servicepeople shortly after the war indicated a massive soldier/veteran antiwar movement, with 37 percent participating in some form of active disobedience or dissent. A 1969 study of veterans found that 47 percent considered the war to be a mistake, 40 percent thought that the problem was tactical, and only 10 percent strongly supported the war and how it was being fought.⁶⁹ Antiwar veterans groups also had significant visibility during the conflict. In November of 1965, for example, only a few months after the first large antiwar demonstration in Washington, 500 veterans signed a full-page ad in the *New York Times* to denounce the war. A significant number of veterans joined the fledgling antiwar movement and formed organizations like Veterans for Peace and Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). Veterans were commonly featured speakers at peace rallies and marches.⁷⁰

Richard Nixon took office just as large numbers of disillusioned veterans began arriving home from Vietnam. The administration understood the power and credibility of protesting veterans and took active steps to attenuate their presence and make them disappear. The primary strategy for doing so was to construct the appearance of opposing sides: of soldiers versus protesters. One method to deal with VVAW, for example, was the White House's creation of a front group called Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace, headed by John O'Neill, a man Nixon hand-picked for the job. O'Neill's group provided the appearance of a large grass roots silent majority of veterans in support of Nixon's policies. O'Neill himself often squared off in public debate against John Kerry, who served as spokesperson for the VVAW at the time.⁷¹ These encounters suggested that Kerry's group represented the exception to soldier opinion and O'Neill's group the rule, whereas all indicators suggest the opposite was the case.

The administration embarked on further strategies to portray the soldier and the protester as natural political enemies. One such measure sought to defuse the "Moratorium to End the Vietnam War," a massive nationwide

demonstration scheduled for November 15, 1969. In advance support of the Moratorium, some 1,300 veterans had signed a full-page ad in the *New York Times*, and veterans played a public role in its general promotion. In response to this powerful statement, the administration ordered the activation of all stateside military branches for the newly named “Honor America Week,” which directed half a million National Guardsmen to fly flags and drive with their headlights on. Reserve units joined with veterans groups such as the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars to organize a massive “countermoratorium” in the streets of Charleston, West Virginia.⁷² The countermoratorium strategy was likely inspired by the previous administration’s experiments in assisting the organizers of the “Support our Boys in Vietnam” parade in New York on May 13, 1967, which drew approximately 70,000 participants and whose advance publicity included an ad in the *New York Times* juxtaposing photos of antiwar protesters with images of dead U.S. soldiers. Recognizing the rhetorical power of the event, the Johnson administration absorbed the organizers into a new White House initiative called the National Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam.⁷³ The Nixon administration made such strategies a fixture. While avoiding an explicit celebration of U.S. policy, events such as the countermoratorium established persistent rituals that pitted patriotism and support of the military against an implied anti-American and antisoldier protester.⁷⁴

Later Nixon began explicitly to draw up sides. In his 1968 Republican nomination acceptance speech, Nixon referred to a “silent majority” of “forgotten Americans” who “provide most of the soldiers who die to keep us free.” This rhetoric of “the forgotten” resonated remarkably with the emerging characterization of war as a conflict between losing and recovering the soldier. In terms of dissociative rhetoric, it displayed a marked preference for the “silent” American, with whom the speech implicitly aligns the soldier, over the “tumult and the shouting.”⁷⁵ Indeed, the term “silent majority” was likely an adaptation of “the Silent Center” used during the Johnson administration by the National Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam to name its troop-supporting constituency. In his “Great Silent Majority” speech of 1969, Nixon characterized demonstrators through an image he claimed to have seen in San Francisco, a protest sign that read “Lose in Vietnam: Bring Our Boys Home.” Here Nixon selectively positioned the protester opposite the soldier, stating that “North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that.”⁷⁶ Later, just before the Kent State shootings, he compared “campus bums” to “tall and proud soldiers,” remarks printed on

the front page of the *New York Times*.⁷⁷ Having struck this division, Nixon then suggested that Americans take sides in the implied conflict, stating that the soldiers "are going to do fine and we have to stand in back of them."⁷⁸

This binary generally infiltrated media depictions of protesters, who were often cast as antitroop in spite of a near absence of such behavior. A study examining newspaper coverage of protester demonstrations between 1965 and 1971 found that protesters were portrayed 56 percent of the time as "troop blaming" or "antitroop" in the press. Of these depictions, the study found that a full 50 percent issued from the mouths of quoted officials or were implied by the newspaper. Only about 6 percent of these antitroop portrayals came from the mouths of protesters themselves, and the authors of the study note that this number would have been closer to zero had they not stretched the definition for what counted as "troop blaming." Moreover, whereas the instances of troop blaming had to be inferred, instances of prosoldier rhetoric by protesters were largely explicit (15 percent), as was antielite rhetoric (29 percent).⁷⁹ Such studies demonstrate a marked trickle-down tendency for official rhetorics that depicted a protester hostile to the soldier.

The end logic of this rhetoric points toward a protester who actively seeks the destruction of the soldier, who wants the soldier to "lose." In his vocal opposition to the 1969 Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam, for example, California Governor Ronald Reagan suggested that those who advocate that soldiers be brought home bear more responsibility for casualties than those who sent the soldiers to war: "We cannot escape the ugly truth" that leaders of the moratorium "lent aid and comfort to the enemy" and that "some American will die tonight because of the activity in our streets."⁸⁰ Later as president, in an attempt to reconcile the American defeat in Vietnam with notions of American strength and rightness-of-cause, Reagan championed the notion that the soldier was "stabbed in the back" by civil dissent at home by the media, the effete politician, and especially the protester.⁸¹ Just before the first Gulf War, George H. W. Bush reiterated this narrative with the vow that, unlike Vietnam, "we will not permit our troops to have their hands tied behind their backs."⁸²

The "stabbed in the back" narrative proved useful during the post-Vietnam period for other purposes too. During the 1980s, the story of the POW/MIA threatened to backfire. Because no accounting could ever be made of the hundreds if not thousands of POW/MIAs supposedly alive and in captivity, Nixon's strategy eventually provoked a populist suspicion that the civilian government had left them behind either intentionally or out of neglect.

This might have presented a credibility problem for those architects and defenders of the Vietnam War. The “stabbed in the back” narrative, however, redeployed the theme of betrayal both to disparage the antiwar movement and to explain the lack of U.S. military effectiveness against a tiny nation.⁸³ The POW/MIA rescue film genre of the 1980s reiterated the official story that the soldier had been constrained, sabotaged, and abandoned by antiwar forces rather than misused and discarded by an ambitious and bellicose leadership. The Rambo genre placed the blame for the debacle not at the feet of those who sent soldiers to be killed and captured but rather with those unwilling to authorize the conflict (now rescripted as a captivity narrative).⁸⁴ Under these terms, war resistance became the equivalent of a de facto attack on the soldier body, not simply a failure to “finish the job” but actively throwing the embattled U.S. soldier to the wolves.

The notion that the protester’s true wishes are to attack physically the soldier eventually settled into the American consciousness in the 1980s. During this time a powerful memory began to etch itself into the public mind: the image of the war protester spitting on the returning veteran G.I. As Jerry Lembcke points out in his book, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*, this image has become a defining phenomenon of the U.S. experience of the Vietnam conflict. The image has been invoked in countless editorials, speeches, and popular films—from (*Rambo*) *First Blood* (1982) to the story’s most recent repetition in the 2008 Ron Howard film *Frost/Nixon*. The story became most visible in the immediate build-up to Operation Desert Storm in 1991, most often invoked to plead that it never happen again.⁸⁵ The only problem, Lembcke argues, is the lack of documented evidence that such spitting ever happened, much less that it was a widespread phenomenon. Moreover, people do not even begin to recount the story until many years after the last soldiers arrived home.⁸⁶ The myth of the antitroop protester that arose in the 1980s was a logical extension of trends already in motion at the tail end of the Vietnam War. By the first Gulf War in 1991, the separation of the soldier and the protester had become so complete that it became nearly impossible to imagine the two in the same body. For example, Navy pilot Jeffrey Zaun, who appeared as a POW on the cover of *Newsweek*, vanished from public view after he said in an interview that the Iraqis were not the “bloodthirsty, amoral people we had heard they were” and that he did not want to kill anybody ever again. “This country didn’t get to see the cost of the war,” he said. “I did.”⁸⁷ Though Zaun gained visibility under the

support-the-troops archetype of the captive soldier, the prevailing dissociation of soldier and protester simply framed him out of the picture.⁸⁸

A more recent example of attempts to discipline the protesting soldier out of existence came in 2004 with John Kerry's Democratic bid for president against Republican incumbent George W. Bush. As mentioned, Kerry had served in Vietnam before returning and joining Vietnam Veterans Against the War. At the time of the presidential election, the United States was embroiled in a contentious occupation of Iraq. Moreover, Bush's questionable military service record during Vietnam opened an opportunity for Kerry to emphasize his own distinguished record of service.⁸⁹ The Republicans hit back by exploiting the "contradiction" between Kerry's service as a soldier and his antiwar activities as a citizen. This attack was largely outsourced to a group calling themselves Swift Boat Veterans for Truth (SBVT). The group conscripted John O'Neill, the man who had assisted Nixon in countering the VVAW in the closing years of the Vietnam War. O'Neill issued a book entitled *Unfit for Command*, whose arguments were integrated into a made-for-TV documentary entitled *Stolen Honor: Wounds that Never Heal* (2004) and a series of SBVT television issue advertisements.⁹⁰

The rhetorical strategies of these ads played heavily on the notion that Kerry's dissent from official policy was inherently hostile to the soldier. One ad focused on the famous episode where members of the VVAW including Kerry "gave their medals back" by throwing them onto the capitol steps (over a barricade, incidentally, that Nixon had built upon the group's arrival). By equating the medals with soldiers, the SBVT ad reinterprets the VVAW's antielite gesture as a trashing of soldiers themselves. Another ad excerpts Kerry's testimony in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The SBVT ad quotes Kerry's testimony as if he himself were accusing American soldiers of committing atrocities, obscuring the fact that these were atrocities to which other soldiers had voluntarily confessed at the earlier Winter Soldier Hearings. Various other ads claim that Kerry met "secretly" with the Viet Cong leadership in Paris, hung out with Jane Fonda, and built his political career on falsely accusing soldiers of war crimes. Perhaps the most visible controversy from this episode regarded the legitimacy of Kerry's medals, which consisted of three Purple Hearts for wounds sustained and both a Bronze Star and a Silver Star for bravery. In particular, SBVT charged that Kerry's final Purple Heart was a "self-inflicted scratch" that he used to attain an honorable discharge.

The success of the Swift Boat campaign has been attributed to the deployment of gendered rhetorics that made Kerry look effeminate, stereotypically French, and weak.⁹¹ Certainly the image of the “self-inflicted scratch” falls into this category, carrying with it inferences of incompetence and frailty. I want to go further to suggest that the image functioned in two additional ways. First, though it is clear that this rhetoric worked to feminize Kerry, it is important to distinguish its mode of doing so. This rhetoric aligns Kerry not with the “obedient woman” donning the yellow ribbon but rather with the protester, a disobedient “bitch” who antagonizes the soldier on war’s gendered landscape. (For an analogous rhetoric, see for example Spiro Agnew’s famous characterization of dissenters as an “effete corps of impudent snobs,” “nattering nabobs,” and “pusillanimous pussyfooters.”⁹²) The self-inflicted scratch follows the same gendered logic as the spitting protester, which Jerry Lembke explains is nearly always recounted to be a female, complete with associations to infidelity, feminine wetness, and corruption of masculine virtue.⁹³ Second, the self-inflicted scratch implies a kind of schizophrenic break within Kerry’s own character that aligns with the logic of dissociation. Because this logic prevents one from imagining the war hero and the protester in the same body, the two personalities must find a way to express their fundamental antipathy. The narrative of the self-inflicted scratch preserves the antipathy by imagining Kerry-the-dissenter attacking Kerry-the-soldier. Because this scratch was enough to take Kerry out of commission, the narrative implies, his life as a soldier was at best a charade. Here Kerry commits the ultimate sin: as a protester, he attacks and then abandons the soldier in Vietnam to pursue a decadent career of antagonizing the POW from the safety of the home front.

Other analyses of the 2004 election attribute the success of Kerry’s opponents to their ability to mobilize a mythic past. G. Mitchell Reyes argues that the Swift Boat campaign worked not because its accusations held some special credibility, but because it drew upon the familiar Rambo myth that imagined intrepid outsiders with inside knowledge (Swift Boat Vets) who swoop in to save the soldier (the POW) from an establishment (Kerry) that has betrayed them.⁹⁴ Reyes’s is a compelling and elegant account that I would like to engage in light of the current analysis. The Rambo myth makes immediate sense not only because it was a popular film but because its deep structure of dissociation has become commonplace in the larger cultural understanding of war. Thus it should be clarified that the “establishment” in the Rambo myth (and as it is used in the Swift Boat campaign) does not simply signify the

"government." The "establishment" is more accurately a substitute term for the protester who in this myth is the powerful personage calling the shots against the underdog soldier. (Indeed, the myth of the spitting protester makes its prime time debut out of Rambo's lips in *First Blood*.)

Reyes notes that the Swift Boat campaign tended to shut down deliberation rather than provoke it, a feature he attributes to its "realist" and self-evidentiary style.⁹⁵ I want to suggest alternatively that the Swift Boat campaign's ability to chill the deliberative impulse is not a feature of its surface but rather is coded into its dissociative logic. The message of this rhetoric is that deliberation of foreign policy is outside the citizen's jurisdiction, and moreover that doing so is a profoundly immoral act tantamount to attacking the soldier. Rather than inspiring a robust public review of official policy that might prevent the abuse of the military, such rhetoric disciplines the citizen into the role of passive spectator and adherent to official decree. The figure of John Kerry, a decorated war hero and former antiwar leader arriving at the center of public discourse in the middle of a contested war, thus served as an intense test of dissociative rhetoric. It is a testament to the pervasiveness and force of this rhetoric that it succeeded in forcing a schizophrenic break within Kerry's persona, pitting a resentful troop-bashing protester not only against his captive brothers-in-arms but against his very own identity as a soldier.

CONCLUSION

This essay sought to track two rhetorical movements in contemporary support-the-troops rhetoric, what I have called deflection and dissociation. Deflection is a process by which the rationale for war migrates from an external policy objective and toward the protection of the soldiers themselves, a trend illustrated through discourse such as the POW/MIA, war film, and the genealogy of the yellow ribbon. Deflection thus works to eliminate war as an object of legitimate deliberation by turning civic attention away from war policy and toward the relatively uncontroversial drama of soldier salvation. The second trope, dissociation, manufactures symbolic distance between citizen and soldier, doing so mainly by coding dissent and deliberation as immoral threats to the soldier body. As such, dissociation extracts the citizen subject from rightful participation in the public deliberation of state violence.

Support-the-troops rhetoric did not issue from any one mouth on a single occasion. Rather, as a fragmented and collective discourse, it has matured

over the decades in a long process of accretion and selection. The political milieu of the last three decades has been an ideal petri dish for the spread of support-the-troops war culture. In 2008, the U.S. military budget was the largest known in the world and exceeded the next 45 nations' budgets combined, comprising 48 percent of world arms spending.⁹⁶ Having achieved the upper hand after World War II, the U.S. military has come to comprise a vast worldwide network with over 700 publicly acknowledged bases in 130 countries as of 2004.⁹⁷ These bases not only provide numerous "lily pads" from which to conduct low-intensity operations, they also serve as overseas "trip wires" that can be used to manufacture a crisis should one be necessary to provide justification for war. Endangered soldiers have thus become a common feature of official discourse, and the alibi of protecting soldiers overseas provides convenient cover for the protection of overseas business and strategic interests. The 1989 U.S. overthrow of the Panamanian government (Operation Just Cause) is one military operation that leaned heavily on the trip-wire effect (this time, endangered marines) to overcome post-Vietnam reticence among the American public. Under the conditions of long-term occupation, such as in Iraq or Afghanistan, support-the-troops rhetoric has become a readily available means for justifying war's continuance.

This rhetoric should also be considered in terms of the militarization of the civic sphere. In shifting civic attention away from deliberative processes and toward the military apparatus itself, this training of the civic sphere is analogous to certain trends in soldier training. Beginning after World War II, the military began attending to a problem of human psychology: the fact that humans hesitate to pull the trigger on other humans. Because this moral impulse has consequences on the battlefield, the military made significant efforts to increase the "firing rate." These efforts were highly successful. In Korea, the rate was raised to 60 percent, in Vietnam to 90 percent, and in the first Gulf War to 98 percent. By the Gulf War in 2003, soldier hesitation became statistically insignificant. A number of advances in training made possible the crafting of the soldier as automatic killing machine. Chief among them was the army's deemphasizing its traditional war cry of "Kill the enemy!" and replacing it with "Protect your buddy!" and "Protect the integrity of your unit!" thus mobilizing a psychology of care in the service of war.⁹⁸ Over time this same shift in emphasis has been applied to the civic sphere to condition the citizenry's collective willingness to "pull the trigger" and authorize state violence. That is, public justifications of war have shifted from demonization to the protection of one's own. This may be appropriate for crafting a responsive

weapon, but problems arise with attempts to streamline and shut down civic engagement. The citizen is often the only check on powers that might abuse the very soldier invoked so frequently. In the context of support-the-troops rhetoric, therefore, the struggle is not simply making sound arguments but more importantly keeping policy deliberation itself alive and valued.

There are good signs that groups are working to invent correctives to support-the-troops rhetoric. A longitudinal study of argumentative strategies used by peace movement groups found that during the Gulf War of 1991, these organizations scrupulously avoided anything that resembled an antitroop position, and instead worked to widen the "web of support" to include not only soldiers but soldier families, taxpayers, Iraqi civilians, and others who might be adversely affected by the war. By the Iraq War of 2003, the study found that peace groups had developed a "narrative of betrayal" that shifted the unmet burden to "support the troops" from antiwar protesters to the White House. Here I would like to insert a cautionary note. Though attempts to redirect support-the-troops rhetoric from within can be productive, there are pitfalls in simply reversing the discourse with a phrase like "support the troops: bring them home." This tactic reinforces deflective rhetoric with the implication that the military apparatus should be the ultimate focus. Moreover, this tactic presses itself into a virtually untenable position: if "support the troops (and by extension the war)" works to justify *any* military action, "support the troops: bring them home" implies the mirror opposite—that *no* military action can be justified for the simple fact that it puts soldiers in danger. Both phrases in effect bypass the *reasons* for military action, whether good or bad. In searching for a corrective, one must keep in mind that support-the-troops rhetoric is primarily about the public sphere rather than war policy per se. If the trope of deflection works to refocus attention onto the military apparatus itself, its antidote is to direct attention back to the question of war objectives and their legitimacy. If the trope of dissociation works to dissolve the deliberative and legislative link between citizen and soldier, then its antidote is to valorize civic deliberation as the citizen's sacred responsibility to the armed forces. Why we fight is still the most important question, and holding leadership accountable for policy by asking this question in public is still the surest way to support the troops.

NOTES

1. Adolf Hitler gave some rather concise advice to war propagandists in *Mein Kampf*. He argued that men stop fighting when they are told to fight for their daily bread, because death would ultimately deprive them of that reward. The only thing that has “driven men against the spears of their enemies” since time immemorial, he argued, has been ideals and values. Adolf Hitler, with editorial sponsors John Chamberlain, Sydney B. Fay, et al., *Mein Kampf: Complete and Unabridged, Fully Annotated* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1939), 200.
2. See Robert L. Ivie, “Images of Savagery in American Justifications for War,” *Communication Monographs* 47 (1980): 279–94. Robert L. Ivie, “Savagery in Democracy’s Empire,” *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2005): 55–65. Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986). For an overview of the use of evil in the War on Terror, see Robert L. Ivie, “The Rhetoric of Bush’s War on Evil,” *K.B. Journal* 1, no. 1 (2004), <http://www.kbjournal.org/nextphase> (accessed August 4, 2009). Christian Spielvogel argues that the good-versus-evil frame and the “strict father” presidential style preferred by George W. Bush was adopted rather than challenged by the John Kerry campaign in the 2004 presidential election. Christian Spielvogel, “‘You Know Where I Stand’: Moral Framing of the War on Terrorism and the Iraq War in the 2004 Presidential Campaign,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8 (2005): 549–69.
3. For an example of contemporary use of Manifest Destiny during the Reagan administration, see Denise Bostdorff, *The Presidency and the Rhetoric of Foreign Crisis* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 185–204.
4. George Mariscal, for example, notes that support-the-troops rhetoric had “trapped an entire peace movement” which “suddenly found itself ‘supporting’ elite combat pilots who boasted of their ‘multiple kills’ on CNN.” George Mariscal, “In the Wake of the Gulf War: Untying the Yellow Ribbon,” *Cultural Critique* 19 (1991): 112. Robert Jensen suggests too that the phrase trapped one in a framework where “opponents of the war were guaranteed to lose and the chance for meaningful political dialogue would evaporate.” Robert Jensen, *Citizens of the Empire: The Struggle to Claim our Humanity* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2004), 19.
5. American National Election Studies, “Trust the Federal Government 1958–2004,” http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab5a_1.htm (accessed August 4, 2009).
6. Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 177. Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 101.
7. This is not an entirely novel justification. President Truman used POWs as justification

- for dropping the atom bomb. "We have used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned all pretense of obeying international laws of warfare." Harry S. Truman, "President Truman's Report to the People on War Developments, Past and Future," *New York Times*, August 10, 1945, 12.
8. Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 178.
 9. See U.S. Department of Defense, Technical Information Center, Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, "Service Personnel Not Recovered Following World War II," February 17, 2008, http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/WWII_MIA/INDEX.HTM (accessed August 4, 2009).
 10. This was the year that the administration initiated the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC). According to the organization, "The mission of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) is to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all Americans missing as a result of the nation's past conflicts." The motto of JPAC is "Until they are home," which helped initiate a war rhetoric that positioned the goal of protecting the soldier as the purpose of war. See http://www.jpac.pacom.mil/index.php?page=mission_overview&size=100&ind=0.
 11. Karen Rasmussen and Sharon Downey, "Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam War Films: Subversion of the Mythology of War," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 176–95.
 12. Frank J. Wetta and Martin A. Novelli, "'Now a Major Motion Picture': War Films and Hollywood's New Patriotism," *The Journal of Military History* 67, no. 3 (2003): 861–82.
 13. Wetta and Novelli, "'Now a Major Motion Picture,'" 871.
 14. Robin Andersen, *A Century of Media, A Century of War* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 219.
 15. For an explanation of the Hollywood Liaison Office, its function, and the films it has both materially supported and rejected, see David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004).
 16. Stephen A. Klein, "Public Character and the Simulacrum: The Construction of the Soldier Patriot and Citizen Agency in *Black Hawk Down*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22 (2005): 427–49. Quote on 428.
 17. This symbolic economy can be found in the Washington, D.C., Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which found a stasis, after a good deal of controversy, in the "antiwar, prosoldier" thematic that now dominates the public reception of war. The memorial marked its uniqueness by replacing pronouncements of purpose with the names of victims etched into a funereal, black granite wall. Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci call such a display "postmodern" because of its presumed indeterminacy. Carole Blair, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci Jr., "Public

- Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 263–68. The Vietnam Wall did not abdicate meaning, however, but rather shifted its emphasis in accordance with the emerging logics of public war rhetoric. President Clinton put this theme to words in his chiasmic admonishment on Memorial Day 1993 at the Vietnam Memorial that we "remember the buried, but bury the memory of Vietnam." See Brian J. Snee, "Clinton and Vietnam: A Case for Amnesic Rhetoric," *Communication Quarterly* 49 (2001): 189–202.
18. Albert Auster, "Saving Private Ryan and American Triumphalism," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 30, no. 2 (2002): 102, 104.
 19. Marouf A. Hasian Jr., "Nostalgic Longings, Memories of the 'Good War,' and Cinematic Representations in *Saving Private Ryan*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18 (2001): 338–58.
 20. A. Susan Owen, "Memory, War, and American Identity: *Saving Private Ryan* as Cinematic Jeremiad," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (2002): 262.
 21. Peter Ehrenhaus, "Why We Fought: Holocaust Memory in Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18 (2001): 321.
 22. Barbara A. Biesecker, "Remembering World War II: The Rhetoric and Politics of National Commemoration at the Turn of the 21st Century," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 396.
 23. Biesecker argues that the vision of home plays a central role in personalizing the battlefield and its civic remembrance. "Remembering World War II," 397.
 24. George L. Mosse, "National Cemeteries and National Revival: The Cult of the Fallen Soldiers in Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 14 (1979): 1–20.
 25. Approximately 300 such accounts survive. See Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Garland Library of Narratives of North American Indian Captivities* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1975).
 26. Colin Ramsey, "Cannibalism and Infant Killing: A System of 'Demonizing' Motifs in Indian Captivity Narratives," *Clio: A Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History* 24 (1994): 55–68.
 27. Tara Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative," *American Literary History* 3, no. 1 (1991): 1–26.
 28. The centrality of the captivity narrative could also be seen in the first great seal proposed by Jefferson, Franklin, and Adams in 1776, which portrayed the Israelites crossing the Red Sea encircled with the motto "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God!" Greg Sieminski, "The Puritan Captivity Narrative and the Politics of the American Revolution," *American Quarterly* 42 (1990): 45.
 29. Sieminski calls the book a "politicized version of the Puritan captivity narrative." See "The Puritan Captivity Narrative," 47.

30. In the post Civil War period, the captivity narrative came to mediate the fears of miscegenation in the white imagination, appearing variously in *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *King Kong* (1933), and *The Searchers* (1956). Ebersole suggests that the drama surrounding the 1974 Patty Hearst kidnapping took on features of the captivity narrative with urban guerrilla as "other." Gary L. Ebersole, "Experience/Narrative Structure/Reading: Patty Hearst and the American Indian Captivity Narratives," *Religion* 28 (1988): 255–82.
31. David E. Procter, "The Rescue Mission: Assigning Guilt to a Chaotic Scene," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 51 (1987): 245–55. Bostdorff, *The Presidency and the Rhetoric of Foreign Crisis*, 175–204.
32. Susan Jeffords, "Rape and the New World Order," *Cultural Critique* 19 (1991): 203–15.
33. Jacqueline Garrelts, "Army Lends Aid to Hollywood," *Army News Service*, July 24, 2004, reprinted at http://www.militaryinfo.com/news_story.cfm?textnewsid=1098.
34. Questions about the Lynch Story began to arise quickly after the initial press conference. Lynch later revealed that she was not being held captive and that the hospital was not occupied by Iraqi troops at the time of the rescue. In fact hospital staff gave her special care and surgery even with a shortage of staff and beds. One hospital employee reported having attempted to return Lynch to U.S. forces in an ambulance, but had to turn back after U.S. forces allegedly fired shots at him. See Hugh Dellios and E. A. Torriero, "Myth; How the Jessica Lynch Story Turned into a Fable," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 1, 2003, G6. See also David D. Kirkpatrick, "Jessica Lynch Criticizes U.S. Accounts of Her Ordeal," *New York Times*, November 7, 2003, A25. Lynch herself did not recollect the episode, so whether she had been raped became a dispute between hospitals. A stateside hospital claimed that there was evidence of rape, an allegation recorded in Lynch's authorized biography *I Am a Soldier, Too*. The Iraqi doctors who treated her, however, claimed they did not see any evidence of rape. See William Branigin, "New Biography Indicates Lynch Was Raped by Captors," *Washington Post*, November 7, 2003, A24. David Weber, "Iraq Doctors Say Lynch Didn't Suffer Sex Assault," *Boston Herald*, November 8, 2003, 6.
35. The discourse surrounding Jessica Lynch helped to discipline hierarchies of American masculinity as it relates to military service. This process is tightly interwoven with the construction of Lynch as object of salvation. See Stacy Takacs, "Jessica Lynch and the Regeneration of American Identity and Power Post-9/11," *Feminist Media Studies* 5, no. 3 (2005): 297–310. Shannon L. Holland, "The Dangers of Playing Dress-up: Popular Representations of Jessica Lynch and the Controversy Regarding Women in Combat," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92 (2006): 27–50. Virginia Sanprie, "Identity Cleft: Analysis of Identity Construction in Media Coverage of the Jessica Lynch Story," *Feminist Media Studies* 5 (2005): 388–91.
36. *Saving Jessica Lynch* conspicuously left African American Shoshana Johnson out of

- the story though she fought, sustained wounds, and was taken hostage in the same skirmish. William Douglas, "Two POWs, One an American Icon, the Other Ignored; Jessica Lynch's Story, Some of it Hyped, Made Her a Star. Shoshana Johnson Faded Away," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 8, 2003, A1. Deepa Kumar notes how Lynch's body became a symbol for the mythic struggle between white male civilization and dark male barbarity. Deepa Kumar, "War Propaganda and the (Ab)uses of Women: Media Constructions of the Jessica Lynch Story," *Feminist Media Studies* 4 (2004): 297–313.
37. Virginia Rohan, "Captive vs. Captive; Ripped-from-the-Headline Movies go Head-to-Head on TV," *The Record (Bergen County, NJ)*, November 9, 2003, E1.
 38. The color yellow probably also had some cultural resonance with the 1949 John Wayne film *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, a story about nineteenth-century American cavalry battling Indian tribes. Here a ribboned woman enters the picture to provoke a competition between two of the cavalry officers. George Mariscal argues that the ribbon represents territory and Manifest Destiny. Mariscal, "In the Wake of the Gulf War," 101–2.
 39. Gerald E. Parsons, "How the Yellow Ribbon Became a National Folk Symbol," *Folklife Center News* 13, no. 3 (1991): 9–11.
 40. The administration showed a reluctance to use the language of hostages and terrorism to describe this group, perhaps because such dramas had not boded well for former presidents. Carol Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism: Presidents on Political Violence in the Post-World War II Era* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 98–105.
 41. John S. Lawrence, "The Persian Gulf Conflict and the Vanishing Hostages," *Journal of American Culture* 17 (1994): 43–46.
 42. Lawrence, "The Persian Gulf Conflict," 45.
 43. Enlightenment art, for example, often depicts nations metonymically as women with chastity sashes. Linda Pershing and Margaret R. Yocom, "The Yellow Ribboning of the USA: Contested Meanings in the Construction of a Political Symbol," *Western Folklore* 55 (1996): 41–85.
 44. Mariscal, "In the Wake of the Gulf War," 104. For a similar argument regarding the gendered home front, see Dana Cloud, "Operation Desert Comfort," in *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, ed. Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 155–70.
 45. For example, on March 1, 1991, the day after the U.S. declared victory and a ceasefire, President George H. W. Bush held a press conference. As a reporter on the scene noted, the president stood at the podium "exulting not so much in the battle triumph but in the public opinion back home." President Bush explained the nature of this victory. "No question about it, the country's solid," the president said. "There isn't any anti-war movement out there. There is pride in these forces." Julia Malone, "POWs Top Allied Agenda," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 2, 1991, A1. Ann Devroy and Guy Gugliotta,

- "Bush to 'Move Fast' on Mideast Peace," *Washington Post*, March 2, 1991, A1.
46. Jesse Green, "The Year of the Ribbon," *New York Times*, May 3, 1992, sec. 9, 7.
 47. Postindustrial war is of course replete with medicalizing discourses of all kinds. The language of the "clean war" generally displaces references to death with the language of medical intervention. Violence is depicted as a "clean-up job" where a region is "secured," "neutralized," and "stabilized" with "surgical strikes" and so on.
 48. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 7.
 49. Morris recognizes a similar function in discourse that sees empire as a signal and terrorism as untranslatable "noise." Rosalind C. Morris, "Images of Untranslatability in the US War on Terror," *Interventions* 6 (2004): 401–23.
 50. Cloud, "Operation Desert Comfort."
 51. "Increased Terror Alert Result of Increased Terror 'Chatter' Level," *PR Newswire*, May 25, 2003, LexisNexis edition. In his October 15, 2005, HBO "Black on Broadway" performance, comedian Louis Black suggested that he believed "the CIA is full of frustrated weathermen."
 52. Slavoj Žižek, "On 9/11, New Yorkers Faced the Fire in the Minds of Men," *The Guardian*, September 11, 2006, 30.
 53. Goodnight illustrates this transference with a news story that focuses on the victims of poverty without exploring its context or causes: "Like viewing the rising winds of a hurricane, the signs of power politics were to be seen as a kind of natural disaster, sweeping up the deserving and the undeserving alike." G. Thomas Goodnight, "The Personal, Technical, and Public Spheres of Argument: A Speculative Inquiry into the Art of Public Deliberation," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 18 (1982): 226.
 54. The campaign hearkened back to the birth of the Advertising Council, founded in February 1942 as the "War Advertising Council" for the purpose of managing cooperation between the ad industry and government to distribute war propaganda.
 55. America Supports You endeavors to boost soldier morale through thank-you letters, care packages, and events like the Freedom Walk of 2006, a parade in "support of the troops" held in 135 communities. The political content of the website is minimal, aside from the occasional jingoistic speech like one Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Peter Pace gave to a Freedom Walk assembly in 2007.
 56. Pershing and Yocom, "The Yellow Ribboning of the USA."
 57. Jack Santino, "Yellow Ribbons and Seasonal Flags: The Folk Assemblage of War," *Journal of American Folklore* 105 (1992): 19–33.
 58. Since World War II, however, a number of institutional changes have challenged the figure of the citizen-soldier. The postwar period hailed the establishment of the permanent military, what Eisenhower called the "military-industrial complex." This event

took the power to raise an army for war out of civilian control. World War II was also the last time Congress would declare war, what amounted to the people's abdication of this power. In 1973, Nixon ended the draft and thus established a military comprised of professionals, a move that helped to safeguard future wars from civic dissent. Additionally, between the U.S. invasions of Iraq in 1991 and 2003, the use of private military contractors rose to more than half of the military personnel on the ground. See P. W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). See also Jeremy Scahill, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army* (New York: Nation Books, 2007).

59. From the beginning of the nation-state, a close relationship between citizen and soldier has been a vital component of democratic governance. The civic republican tradition, a pillar of Western democratic thought, stakes itself on the character of the citizen-soldier, which joins the two into one consubstantial identity. Civic republicanism holds that a state could be much more stable and just if it distributes sovereign military power among independent citizen-soldiers. This tradition underlies the historical ties between military service and the granting of equal rights and elective office. That is, the citizen's proximity to the military has historically legitimated a democratic voice in policy decisions. This is especially the case for policies regarding the use of the military itself. If the citizen-soldier represented the distribution of sovereign power among the citizenry, the separation of citizen from soldier in the late twentieth century represents the reconsolidation of political-military power in the sovereign executive. For more on the citizen-soldier and the civic republican tradition, see Iseult Honohan, *Civic Republicanism* (New York: Routledge, 2002). See also Elaine Scarry, "Watching and Authorizing the Gulf War," in *Media Spectacles*, ed. Marjorie Garber, Jann Matlock, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 1993), 57–73. R. Claire Snyder, *Citizen-Soldiers and Manly Warriors: Military Service and Gender in the Civic Republic Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999).
60. Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 108.
61. Kenon Breazeale, "Bringing the War Back Home: Consuming Operation Desert Storm," *Journal of American Culture* 17 (1994): 33.
62. Ledyard King, "Officer was the One Behind 500 Letters," *USA Today*, October 15, 2003, 14A.
63. Generally, as support for a war falls, policy makers increasingly use the troops to justify the conflict. This generates certain inevitable contradictions. In 2007, for example, Congress considered defunding the unpopular occupation of Iraq. Those in favor of continued funding leaned heavily on support-the-troops rhetoric even as polls showed that 72 percent of soldiers stationed in Iraq favored withdrawal. Richard Sisk, "70% of

Troops Want Out - Poll," *Daily News*, March 1, 2006, 10. This debate came at a new low point in public support for the war, with solid majorities of Americans believing that the military "should have stayed out" of Iraq and that a timetable ought to be set for withdrawal by 2008. "The War in Iraq: The Bush Administration vs. Congress, April 9–12, 2007," *CBSNews.com*, April 13, 2007, http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/CBSNews_polls/april_iraq.pdf (accessed August 5, 2009). In response to calls for withdrawal, the Bush administration and the Republican minority went on the offensive with a call to "support the troops." President Bush began his March 17 weekly radio address with, "In times of war, Congress has no greater obligation than funding our war fighters." The speech ended on a similar note: "Many in Congress say they support the troops, and I believe them. Now they have a chance to show that support" by approving "emergency funding for our troops." The president hammered home this message in the next three weeks, pleading with Congress to provide the "resources our troops urgently need," those on "the front lines" whose "clock is ticking." The solution, Bush argued, was to "put partisan politics aside, and do our duty toward those who defend us," those troops "caught in the middle" of a needless debate. Instead, Bush argued, Congress should "put our troops first, not politics." See George W. Bush, "Radio Address" Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, April 7, 2007, http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2007_presidential_documents&docid=pd16ap07_txt-3 (accessed August 11, 2009); George W. Bush, "Radio Address, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, March 24, 2007, http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2007_presidential_documents&docid=pd02ap07_txt-4 (accessed August 11, 2009); George W. Bush, "Radio Address, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, March 17, 2007, http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2007_presidential_documents&docid=pd26mr07_txt-3 (accessed August 11, 2009).

64. Biesecker, "Remembering World War II," 396.
65. Andersen argues that this switch in function reflected the gratification of films like *Black Hawk Down* and *Saving Private Ryan*, which was to experience combat rather than identify with a character. *A Century of Media, A Century of War*, 217.
66. A study of journalism during the first Gulf War, for example, found a preponderance of backlit sunrise and sunset shots. Daniel Hallin and Todd Gitlin, "Agon and Ritual: The Gulf War as Popular Culture and as Television Drama," *Political Communication* 10 (1993): 417.
67. Breazeale, "Bringing the War Back Home," 33.
68. There are a few notable exceptions to this rule. See for example David Zeiger's 2005 documentary *Sir! No Sir!* (sirnosir.com).
69. Richard R. Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 131.

70. For additional histories on the veterans movement, see Melvin Small and William D. Hoover, eds., *Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 91–156.
71. Helen Kennedy, “Kerry’s Old Navy Foe Looks to Sink Senator,” *Daily News*, May 4, 2004, 26.
72. Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 54.
73. Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 101.
74. The same rhetorical strategies were present, for example, in the “support the troops” rallies organized by AM talk radio hosts amid the large antiwar protests in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. ClearChannel radio talk show host Glenn Beck organized a series of “Rallies for America,” what amounted to a corporate twist on a Nixon-era strategy. At the time, ClearChannel radio owned roughly a third of the nation’s radio stations, so the supposed “grass roots” campaigns had massive coverage. ClearChannel also had historical ties with the Bush administration. See Frank Ahrens, “‘Rallies for America’ Draw Scrutiny; Critics Question Clear Channel’s Ties,” *Washington Post*, March 26, 2003, A10. On an institutional level, America Supports You, a White House group established in 2004, has been a central hub for support parades and other community events.
75. Richard Nixon, “Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speech,” *Republican National Convention*, August 8, 1968, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25968> (accessed August 5, 2009).
76. Richard Nixon, “The Great Silent Majority,” November 3, 1969, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2303&st=silent+majority&st1> (accessed August 5, 2009).
77. Juan de Onis, “Nixon Puts ‘Bums’ Label on Some College Radicals,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 1970, 1.
78. Onis, “Nixon Puts ‘Bums’ Label on Some Collect Radicals,” 1.
79. Thomas D. Beamish, Harvey Molotch, and Richard Flacks, “Who Supports the Troops? Vietnam, the Gulf War, and the Making of Collective Memory,” *Social Problems* 42 (1995): 344–60. Quote on 354.
80. Ronald Sullivan, “Cahill Gets an Enthusiastic Reception from Hudson Democrats,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1969, 53.
81. Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Presenting the Medal of Honor to Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez,” *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*, February 24, 1981, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/22481d.htm> (accessed August 5, 2009). For a history of the “stabbed in the back” motif not only through Vietnam, but also in Nazi justifications for the German loss in World War I, see Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*.
82. George H. W. Bush, “The President’s News Conference,” *George Bush Presidential Library*

- and Museum, November 30, 1990, http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2516&year=1990&month=11 (accessed August 5, 2009).
83. Even so, the notion that hundreds if not thousands of POW/MIAs remained in Vietnam became an albatross around the necks of the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations, all of whom ran into political resistance when attempting to open trade with the new Vietnamese economy. H. Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 173–202.
 84. This narrative appears not only in the Rambo films but also in the *Missing in Action* series and *Uncommon Valor*. Many of these themes reverberated through other films like *Lethal Weapon* and television shows like *Air Wolf*, *Magnum P.I.*, *The A-Team*, *Rip Tide*, *T.J. Hooker*, and *Miami Vice*. See Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 137–38.
 85. A study found that over half of coverage involving protesters and troops between 1990 and 1991 made reference to protesters' supposed antitroop behavior during Vietnam. Beamish, Molotch, and Flacks, "Who Supports the Troops?" 346.
 86. Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*, 71–83.
 87. Quoted in Elliott Gruner, "Forgetting the Gulf War POW," *Journal of American Culture* 17 (1994): 49.
 88. The disappearance of the protesting soldier makes a film like Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) a uniquely subversive text.
 89. Bush's records suggested large gaps in his service as well. See Walter V. Robinson, "1-Year Gap in Bush's Guard Duty; No Record of Airman at Drills in 1972–73," *Boston Globe*, May 23, 2000, A1. Michael Dobbs, "Assembling Full War Records a Challenge," *Washington Post*, September 30, 2004, A7.
 90. For a more complete treatment of this episode and especially the films involved in this debate, see Roger Stahl, "Vietnam Flashbacks: Dueling Memories of Dissent in the 2004 Presidential Elections," in *The Rhetoric of the New Political Documentary*, ed. Thomas W. Benson and Brian J. Snee (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 78–104.
 91. Moya Ann Ball, "The Role of Vietnam in the 2004 Presidential Election," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8 (2005): 689–93. Anna Cornelia Fahey, "French and Feminine: Hegemonic Masculinity and the Emasculation of John Kerry in the 2004 Presidential Race," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24 (2007): 132–50.
 92. For history and context of the "impudent snobs" remark, see Martin Mayer, "The Brilliance of Spiro Agnew," *Esquire*, May 1970, 117–19. Agnew's "nattering nabobs" designation was famously penned by William Safire. For a discussion of both, see Andrew A. King and Floyd Douglas Anderson, "Nixon, Agnew, and the 'Silent Majority': A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Polarization," *Western Journal of Speech* 35 (1971): 243–55.

93. In his discussion, Lembcke observes that the spitting protester is a reflection of the mythic archetype of feminine “wetness” typically viewed as a corrupting agent to masculine (or militaristic) dryness. See *The Spitting Image*, 127–43.
94. G. Mitchell Reyes, “The Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, the Politics of Realism, and the Manipulation of Vietnam Remembrance in the 2004 Presidential Election,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9 (2006): 571–600.
95. Reyes, “The Swift Boat Veterans for Truth,” 571–600.
96. Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, “The FY 2009 Pentagon Spending Request—Global Military Spending” February 22, 2008, http://www.armscontrolcenter.org/policy/securityspending/articles/fy09_dod_request_global/.
97. Chalmers A. Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), 4. Johnson suggests that the actual number of foreign bases is likely to be in the thousands.
98. Jeff Tietz, “The Killing Factory,” *Rolling Stone*, no. 998, (April 20, 2006): 54–76.

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